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**THE END OF THE BEGINNING,
OR THE BEGINNING OF THE END?
PLAN COLOMBIA AND ITS PROSPECTS**

BY

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ABSTRACT

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Plan Colombia is billed as a comprehensive, holistic, integrated, interagency solution for Colombia's multiple internal ills. Perhaps because it is so ambitious, its implementation and prospects for success have come under serious criticism since its inception. This paper discusses Plan Colombia's goals, examines whether the plan will be able to meet its altruistic objectives under current circumstances, and reviews possible alternative scenarios and methods of partial implementation in a resource-constrained environment

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PREFACE

At the beginning of the 1st century B.C., the Cilician pirates represented a major criminal, political and economic threat to the entire Mediterranean world. These ruthless adventurers plundered coastal cities, kidnapped and held for ransom thousands of prominent persons, enslaved populations, and destroyed commercial shipping. Some desultory attempts to weaken or attrit the pirates were carried out over the years, but there was no consolidated effort to wipe out the pirate threat --- not least because some "legitimate" economic sectors benefited from the pirates. Then in 73B.C., Pompey the Great, who had recently carried out a series of successful campaigns on land, decided to add to his glory by ending the maritime threat from the Cilician pirates once for all.

Pompey rallied all the elements necessary for a major strategic campaign: political will based on clearly defined national interest, a carefully planned campaign strategy, and a sizable, well-manned and well-trained fleet. In a forty-day period, he swept pirate ships from the seas wherever his fleet encountered them, and then proceeded to the pirates' home bases in Cilicia (the southern coast of modern Turkey). Pompey attacked and reduced several major strongholds by siege, by offers of amnesty, or by intimidation. Most remarkably, since at the time Roman "pacification" of rebels usually consisted of defeated populations being enslaved or crucified or a blend of both, Pompey showed considerable restraint in dealing with the twenty-thousand-odd captives from the Cilician strongholds. He determined that these were potentially productive people with some significant skills, and proceeded to relocate them to other areas within Rome's possessions and allied states which had become depopulated in the era's constant wars.

The Cilician pirates can be compared in our day to another transnational criminal-sociopath organization, which causes damage quite disproportionate to its numbers and whose mitigation or outright elimination requires a major military effort tied to a variety of social programs: the narco-insurgency in Colombia. However desirable they may be as an option, Pompey's relatively direct methods cannot be duplicated precisely in modern times due to a number of political factors. The most directly affected state, Colombia, lacks the resources and capabilities to deal with the crime, insurgency and general violence within its borders, and the United States provides an insatiable demand for product but at the same time cannot marshal the political will to launch a US-led military effort in Colombia of the magnitude required for a rapid military success. What, then, is a realistic and less draconian solution to the problem?

Plan Colombia is a much-misunderstood (and frequently much-maligned) Colombian initiative that poses the best plan of action to achieve peace in a country wracked by violence for five decades. Alternatives presented to date are unworkable or non-existent. To paraphrase Churchill, it may not be the best plan, but it is certainly the best plan we have. Our involvement in helping Colombia to solve its internal problems is not just a matter of disinterested altruism. The stated national security interests of the United States include preservation and encouragement of democracy, eliminating the transnational threat of the drug scourge, and promoting prosperity. While those are major issues in and of themselves, Colombia's strategic location (next door to the Panama Canal and to our principal supplier of foreign oil), large population, and unfortunate status as the world's largest producer and exporter of illegal narcotics make it of particular importance to us. We cannot allow it to become a failed state. The best way to prevent that result is to help the Colombians fulfill their plan. How we can do that is the topic of this paper.

I would like to clarify that from the outset I had certain assumptions regarding this topic, based on my personal and professional experience in and out of South America. These assumptions are as follows:

- a) There are two clear adversaries of the state in Colombia: a criminal narcotics industry of prodigious size, energy, and capability; and a long-term, sociopath-criminal insurgency that originated on ideological bases of either the left or the right, but has mutated into a different creature driven by desire for profits and power. The narcotics and insurgent organizations have blended due to a symbiotic relationship to the point that it is almost impossible to separate one from the other.
- b) The Colombian polity suffers from a number of social inequities that provide a fertile ground for violence, insurgency and crime as relief valves for a disenfranchised or frustrated population; violence has become part of Colombia's culture.
- c) The narcotics industry is chiefly demand-driven, although to some extent it can generate demand in a target audience.
- d) The narcoinsurgent problem requires a regional approach that will prevent it from spreading to other areas, or simply shifting its base if it gets too "hot" in one country.

Despite extensive research, I found no objective evidence to dissuade me from these assumptions. If that sounds like prejudice, then *Caveat emptor*. We cannot afford the niceties of seeing the narcotics traffic problem as a localized, minor criminal event separated from broader regional involvement and from reform at home. Our national interest is not only in seeing an end to illegal narcotics traffic, but in assisting Colombia to become a free, stable and prosperous nation. Like Pompey the Great, we must get our strategic and policy ducks in a row and get on with a task that is not pleasant or easy, but is possible and necessary.

My thanks to Dr. Gabriel Marcella for his valuable advice, patience, and motivation, and my gratitude to my colleague Col Almidien Moreno, Army of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, for the initial inspiration and for all the moral, intellectual, and high-octane-liquid assistance in completing this project.

THE END OF THE BEGINNING, OR THE BEGINNING OF THE END? PLAN COLOMBIA AND ITS PROSPECTS

THE ISSUE

Colombia has reached a point where, if something is not done to correct a catastrophic internal situation, the country is in danger of collapse. The possible outcomes include the creation of a narco-kleptocracy, a “failed state” torn into feuding cantons by civil war, or — with sufficient assistance from without and commitment from within --- a gradual transition through reform to a democratic state with functioning institutions. Plan Colombia was crafted by the Colombian government to answer the country’s problems; although it counts on external assistance it is a Colombian plan. The United States, the European Union, regional nations and other organizations and countries need to assist the legitimate government of Colombia in successfully resolving the nation’s internal difficulties, or risk the destabilization of South America’s strategic “northern cone.” Because of the international ramifications of Colombia’s internal problems, a plan that incorporates a unified regional strategy to combat illicit drug traffic, and threats to democratic stability, is required.

BACKGROUND

Colombia is located in northern South America, running from where the continent meets Central America down to the Equator. It is the only nation in South America with both Pacific and Caribbean coasts. It is a rugged country divided into a coastal plateau in the west, a series of high Andean ridges cut by large, navigable rivers and their valleys in the center, a plain (llanos) in the east, and a hilly tropical plateau descending to Amazonian jungle (selva) in the south and southeast. The country is rich in agriculture and minerals, ranking as one of the great exporters of high-quality coffee and emeralds in addition to metal ores. Oil was discovered in several locations in the last forty years. The central valleys enjoy great weather year-round, and the Caribbean coast is known for beaches and natural beauty.

Colombia has not been as fortunate socially and politically as she is physically. Socially, Colombia is deeply divided between a relatively small and prosperous upper and middle class and a large and very poor lower class. The assassination in 1948 of Liberal leader Jorge Eliecer Gaitán led to a huge riot (known as “El Bogotazo” due to the location in the capital city) which deteriorated into a vicious country-wide civil war; the period lasted for years and is now known as “La Violencia” for the violence which characterized it. Although it began as a political conflict, the turmoil of La Violencia soon permeated every facet of Colombian life, to include widespread abuses of law, total breakdown of or loss of confidence in civil authority, and the

loss of the state's monopoly on violence. Although an authoritarian government restored order to some extent in the 1950's, the country has never fully recovered from that episode, and violence has become an apparently ineradicable aspect of Colombian life. A major characteristic of this lawlessness was a link between crime and politics. Murder, extortion, and kidnapping went hand in hand with widespread political corruption. The economically and politically dominant class had uncomfortably close ties with or participation in criminal activity, if not directly heading organized crime. It is important to note that except for one brief interval in the 1950's, when Armed Forces commander Rojas Pinilla deposed a civilian dictator and ruled for a few years, the military has stayed out of Colombian politics since the 1890's.¹

Colombia's climate and soils made it a very suitable location for growing cordage quality hemp during World War II, and large areas were planted. Once nylon replaced hemp, farmers continued to grow small amounts to take advantage of the plants' traditional dual role as a recreational drug; Colombian marijuana was particularly high in the intoxicant resin cannabinol. As the 1960's led to a booming market in the United States and to a lesser extent in Europe, the sizable criminal networks in Colombia began exporting their product to the US, first in conjunction with the larger and more established Mexican organizations and then on their own. Marijuana-based fortunes sprouted in the country's northeast, where much of the transshipment to the US originated, very often with the collusion or participation of the government officials who were supposed to suppress the drug trade.

In the early 1970's, legend has it that Augusto Pinochet's crackdown on Chilean criminals drove the relatively small-scale cocaine organizations operating in his country (more famous for catering to the seamy side of Argentine society than for large-scale sales to the US) to other places where they were less threatened by an efficient, determined and ruthless law enforcement organization. Small wonder that some of them landed in Colombia, which had a continent-wide reputation for criminal activity. Expecting to form lucrative partnerships, they sought out the Colombian organizations which had been exporting marijuana, and provided them with points of contact in the coca producing countries of Bolivia and Peru. Soon, the Colombians, with their transportation and distribution networks with the US already established in the marijuana trade, disposed of the Chileans and took over the networks themselves; they found a rich market in the US for their new product (even developing a version of cocaine, crack, as a new and cheaper form for greater US consumer appeal). This led to an export industry on a far greater financial scale than marijuana. It became one of Colombia's principal and most lucrative exports, and changed the face of Colombian society; now the criminals had previously unseen money and power, and they quickly became a major economic and political

force. Vigorous prosecution efforts by Colombian law enforcement supported by US agencies saw the dismemberment of several of the most powerful drug cartels, but the drug trade merely passed into the hands of smaller, networked organizations. These groups faced a serious challenge from law enforcement, especially in their ability to face large and well-armed police and military units.

Since the 1960's, Colombia has been characterized by State Department as "a constitutional, multiparty democracy in which the Liberal and Conservative parties have long dominated politics."² The level to which these parties are truly representative of the broad spectrum of Colombian society has been hotly contested by a number of political groups both within and outside of the law; in this latter category, there are currently three active insurgent groups operating throughout Colombia. These groups were generally Marxist-Leninist organizations which sprang up in the 1950's and '60's, and had small but dedicated followings in the countryside. A fourth insurgent group, known as the Movimiento 19 de Abril, or M-19, was a populist-nationalist urban and rural organization based on the ideology of the dictator Rojas Pinilla; it was reincorporated into Colombian society in the 1980's and early 1990's. Many of M-19's cadre were murdered by various allegedly right-wing political elements after surrendering, in retribution for M-19's many vicious terrorist acts during the two decades when the group carried out its criminal activities. A similar fate had befallen members of the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC), the country's largest insurgent group, when FARC created a legitimate political party, the Patriotic Union (UP) in 1985. These events set a bad precedent for the state's ability to guarantee the safety of further attempts by insurgent groups to renounce violence and reintegrate themselves into the political process.

The remaining groups, which had been funded largely by Castro and by kidnapping and extortion up to the late 1980's, saw much of their foreign support and money dry up after the fall of the Soviet Union. Unrest in the countryside had led to lack of agricultural profitability, which in turn weakened the insurgents' traditional economic base of extortion against middle class farmers and ranchers. While their initial ideologically-based reaction to the drug trade had been to oppose and even execute drug dealers, or at least to attempt to extort them (often with fatal results), the insurgents and the traffickers eventually came to an apparent financially-driven understanding with traffickers; the latter could provide funding from their huge profits, and the former could provide a safe haven through their military apparatus. Thus both sides grew in strength and capability in a symbiotic relationship similar to that of the mosquito and the malarial plasmodium – two parasites jointly preying on the same victims. The traffickers soon began a period of vertical integration of their industry, using their greatly increased access to the

hinterland to transfer coca leaf cultivation from Peru and Bolivia to Colombia. This increased their efficiency by shortening their supply lines, and also made a large part of the rural peasantry (*campesinato*) beholden to them and the insurgents for providing the infrastructure and market for a lucrative cash crop. The streamlining of the operation and the increase of the popular support base led to increased profits and increased military power for the trafficker-guerrilla axis. By 1998, the government found itself increasingly unable to deal with the guerrillas militarily as the security forces suffered a series of stinging reverses, and with the drug dealers politically or juridically as they extended their influence over Colombian society. Colombia found itself, as Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy of the US Barry McCaffrey stated, in the midst of a "drug emergency."³

The Conservative Party (Partido Conservador) candidate, Andres Pastrana, won the Presidential elections of 1998, which were characterized by State Department as free, fair and transparent.⁴ Pastrana succeeded a Liberal president, Ernesto Samper, who had been accused by local sources and by the U.S. government of receiving campaign funds from narcotraffickers. Pastrana, who campaigned on a platform of honesty, transparency and peace, took some extreme measures in his attempt to bring peace to the country: he offered the largest insurgent organization a huge chunk of territory where government forces would not operate and the insurgents would run the local government --- in effect surrendering national sovereignty over a portion of Colombia's territory which it has labeled as a safe haven for negotiation. This is an extreme measure indeed in South America, where sovereignty is a value taught to every schoolchild, and underlines the government's idealistic commitment to the peace process.

PLAN COLOMBIA

In late 1999, in keeping with the President's proactive agenda, Pastrana's Conservative Party government drafted an ambitious plan that offered a comprehensive solution to Colombia's multiple problems. Called Plan Colombia, its stated goal is to establish a process to bring about peace, prosperity, and a strengthened state.⁵ Specifically, the plan proposes strategies for reform of the justice system, protection of human rights, democratization, social development, economic stabilization, a peace process, and strong and effective counternarcotics strategy.

This is a very ambitious and, in some ways, a very optimistic plan. It involves a lot of moving parts which depend on each other for success, and is based on the actions of internal and external actors. It is predicated on goodwill and honest dealing by parties with spotty track records in this respect. It requires considerable funding that may not be available in the near

out-years given the current financial slump in world markets. Due to its complex nature and also for political reasons and perhaps out of ignorance,⁶ the plan has many detractors. An overview of the plan's provisions and requirements is necessary to understand why it is considered so optimistic in some circles.

The importance of Colombia in this region cannot be overemphasized. Colombia borders every Ibero-American country in northern South America, has the right physical conditions for coca and poppy cultivation, convenient networks and routes for its transportation, a large population, and relative proximity to drug markets. If a short-term solution to drug trafficking in Colombia is implemented, the criminal-insurgent groups can set up bases in neighboring countries relatively easily. However, they will almost certainly return once the pressure is off. Regional participation is required to ensure this spread cannot take place, but the main point of effort must remain a long-term solution to Colombia's problems.

FACTORS IN THE SOLUTION: FINANCIAL BASIS

Plan Colombia calls for \$7.5 billion dollars (FY2000 equivalent) total expenditure over a three-year period. According to the US State Department, the Colombian government plans to pay some \$4 billion, derived from a combination of Colombia's own funds and loans from international financial institutions:⁷

\$3B from Colombian Government general revenues (national budget)

\$900M borrowed from international financial institutions

\$600M from "mandatory internal peace bonds"

In addition, multilateral and bilateral donors are also expected to contribute to socioeconomic development programs (note there is no military assistance envisioned in this tranche). This portion could total up to \$6.9B (more than the plan originally envisioned), as follows:

- \$1.7B from the Inter-American Development Bank
- \$1.4B from the World Bank
- \$2.7B from the International Monetary Fund
- \$600M from the Andean Development Corporation
- \$500M from the Latin American Reserve Fund

This list probably includes monies received for programs that would supplement, rather than form a direct part of, Plan Colombia. Mention of the additional funding is probably also an attempt to provide a "soft landing" for the Plan since Colombia is facing some of its toughest economic times in years, with negative or slow GDP growth in 1999 and 2000 following brisk

growth earlier in the decade; as a result, the Colombian government may not be able to meet its objective of providing \$4B from its own funds.

- The US contribution toward Plan Colombia and associated programs for FY2001 is \$1.3B, of which 35 per cent is assistance for neighboring countries and US operations:
- Upgrades to US Forward Operating Locations overseas \$116.5M
- DoD Andean Ridge Intelligence-gathering 7.0M
- Classified DoD intelligence program 55.3M
- Treasury Dept. "Drug Kingpin" program 2.0M
- DoD Airborne Reconnaissance Low (ARL) program 30.0M
- Aid for Peru (Interdiction) 32.0M
- Aid for Bolivia 110.0M
- \$25M Interdiction, \$85M alternative development
- Aid for Ecuador 20.0M
 - \$12M Interdiction, \$8M alternative development
- Aid for other countries 18.0M
- Total for non-Colombia assistance \$458.8M

The remaining \$860.3M are provided to Colombia in one form or another, with 75 per cent (\$642.3M) of this tranche going to military and police assistance (\$519.2M and \$123.1M respectively). The remainder, allocated to alternative development, aid to the displaced, human rights, judicial reform, law enforcement and rule of law, and "Peace" is proportionately low at 25 per cent, but given the large overall sum (\$218.0) still amounts to a significant contribution in each of these areas. In spite of these figures, with only 39.36 per cent of the total outlay going to the Colombian military, media reporting on Plan Colombia regularly claims that this is a "military" plan.⁸

As of mid-March 2001, Bush administration Secretary of State Colin Powell requested \$730M in FY2002 funding from the Senate as an "Andean Initiative." The funds are to be managed by the U.S. Department of State, rather than by Justice or DoD; much of the money --- \$399M --- is for Colombia, but the approach is clearly a regional one, with \$156M going to Peru and \$101M to Bolivia. The remaining \$75M are divided among Panama, Ecuador, Brazil and Venezuela. This is clearly an expanded version of Plan Colombia with even more assistance to regional actors.⁹

Plan Colombia's financial soundness may be seriously affected by the unrelenting violence in the country. The government has pledged itself to provide a very substantial share of state revenue for the next several years, but it is very difficult to predict what that government revenue will be since the insurgents frequently target the economic infrastructure. For example, in early February 2001 the Caño Limón pipeline, which enables revenue from oil exports, shut down for forty days following terrorist attacks. In March, the government reported that the Pacific port of Buenaventura, which handles 65 per cent of the country's seaborne exports and imports, was reduced to 30 per cent of normal operating capacity because FARC terrorists had destroyed the telecommunications repeater towers for the city. The government was losing an average of \$2M a day in revenue.¹⁰ Coupled with the softening of the Colombian and world economy, and the likelihood of a reduced export market, it is not unlikely that Colombia may require additional infusions of funds from external sources in order to meet its goals.¹¹

THE EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

A significant share of Plan Colombia's funding --- approximately \$650M from the outset --- is supposed to derive from European sources. In early 2000, there was lukewarm support from European Union headquarters in Brussels; since then, European political support has been distinctly underwhelming, and only a small portion of the anticipated funding has been committed. Pastrana had anticipated as much as \$1.5B for Plan Colombia would come from Europe, either as direct aid or as credits. Spain pledged \$100M and Norway \$20M on a bilateral basis, with all this funding to be used for non-military expenditures; the European Parliament has resolved that the Colombian conflict can only be resolved by peaceful means.¹² President Pastrana visited Europe in February 2001, and received tepid response.¹³

The apparent reason for European reluctance is that Europe was not included in initial negotiations, and Plan Colombia was presented as a *fait accompli* in which the Europeans were invited to participate. In addition, there have been predictable complaints from the left-leaning European Parliament that the plan is too focused on a military solution and tramples human rights, in addition to "[provoking] widespread opposition from many sectors of civil society in the U.S., Europe and Latin America."¹⁴ The European press, which consistently romanticizes the narcoinsurgent guerrillas as Che-Guevara like romantic rebels, has generally focused on the ecological aspects of aerial spraying, and on paramilitary violence.

Javier Solana, former NATO Secretary General and now European Union High Commissioner for Foreign Policy and Security, visited Colombia in March to discuss the peace process, and a number of European ambassadors visited the peace talks at FARC's jungle

headquarters in San Vicente del Caguán during the same period. Solana stated at the end of the visit that the EU would review commitments in April 2001.¹⁵ The European Parliament continued to oppose what they consider to be the overly militaristic aspects of the plan. For the moment at least, European funding promises to be a dry hole. The anticipated direct contributions will probably have to come from another source. To base the plan (paraphrasing the Duke of Medina Sidonia before he set out for the conquest of England at the head of the Spanish Armada in 1588) on the confident hope of a miracle ---- that the Europeans will overcome their pusillanimity ---- would be a great error.

Where the Europeans may yet be able to assist (and probably one major reason why the Colombian government persists in its approaches to the EU) is by opening markets to Colombian businesses and by providing business investment incentives to aid the South American nation's fading economy. Plan Colombia's approach to the Colombian economy recommends a number of actions which the EU or its member nations could take in this respect, noting that Spain and the UK have already signed bilateral investment agreements.¹⁶

FACTORS IN THE SOLUTION: MILITARY BASIS

Of note, there is no section of the internationally disseminated version of Plan Colombia designated as "military strategy." The Plan's list of elements includes a national defense strategy to restructure and modernize the armed forces and police to restore the rule of law, combat organized crime and armed groups, and protect and promote human rights. This is little more than acknowledgment of the military and police as guarantors of internal peace, a function that those entities serve in almost all republics. The closest this version of the plan comes to supporting the military element as part of the solution is when it states "the army and the police must necessarily continue to increase their capabilities so that they will be able to maintain an effective presence throughout the country and ensure a peaceful settlement."¹⁷ The bulk of material in Plan Colombia that deals with this increase is found in the chapter on the Counter Drug Strategy.

A much more detailed version of the plan is the initial implementation document for Plan Colombia, Phase I of the President of Colombia's Interagency Action Plan. It includes an extensive and detailed military counterdrug campaign plan in addition to extensive participation with and by other agencies to accomplish a multilateral solution. Curiously, there is no section of this document that deals, militarily or otherwise, with the insurgent threat except as a side effect of the drug problem, or implicit in the larger and somewhat nebulous theme of maintaining public order against "delinquents." The military portion of the document is concerned

exclusively with eradication and interdiction operations, stressing legitimacy and human rights considerations. It makes one reference to "breaking the link between traffickers and armed groups" in the overview of military objectives, but does not delve further.¹⁸ The logical assumption is that the plan will be implemented in an environment where peace can be expected; this is perhaps an anticipation of President Pastrana's ability to convince the guerrillas to end their participation in violence, and therein lies the rub.

The military portion of the Interagency Action Plan strategy breaks with the past. Previous strategy, tactics and units concentrated on a traditional military solution, defeating the enemy on the battlefield. They were predicated on rapid envelopment of enemy targets, carried out by the largely conscript army, employing limited intelligence collection and dissemination, followed by a withdrawal from the area. The weak points in that strategy which I observed as an intelligence trainer in Colombia in 1991-92 were: the low quality of manpower provided by the conscript army --- poorly trained, poorly motivated, poorly supplied; poor mobility provided by limited airlift capability and difficult access to the operating area from major supply bases; and poor intelligence collection, analysis, and dissemination coupled with almost nonexistent communications, command and control (C3) capability at the tactical level. These problems became exacerbated over the course of the decade. By the late 1990's, the large influx of narcotics-derived wealth allowed guerrillas to equal or outdo the government in C3 equipment, as well as individual troop gear and light weapons and explosives power. In several cases, government troops up to the company-plus level were severely defeated in battle by the insurgents.¹⁹ Frustrated and untrained officers tended to ignore human rights in many cases, and frequently added to the insurgency problem by mistreating the local population. Corruption in the military and police was rampant, sometimes to the extent of trading with the enemy. Between 1994 and 2000, the National Police discharged 11,000 of its 100,000 agents on charges of rights abuses, corruption, and drug-trafficking. In October 2000 alone, the army fired 388 officers for alleged human rights violations.²⁰

The expulsions are actually a symptom that the government means what it says about professionalizing the force and preventing abuses. Plan Colombia envisions a more egalitarian army, better equipped and far better trained. The uneducated conscript of the past and his sometimes brutal and corrupt officers will be replaced with trained volunteers with enough professional ability to reduce or eliminate the problems of the past. US efforts to provide training have not always been well received by the Colombian military, as the US demands a lengthy and intrusive human rights vetting process to screen out any soldiers who may have committed violations in the past. In principle, the Plan supports this initiative, since it implies

that respect for human rights is a major step towards ending abuses by the military and others in the government which have contributed to the current problems.

Ambassador David Passage lists a number of specific areas for improvement that the Colombian military need to address for basic tactical proficiency:²¹

- Training and doctrine for night, joint and small unit operations
- Improvement in collection, evaluation, and dissemination of usable intelligence
- Development of quick reaction capabilities
- Creation of an airborne strike force and quick reaction capability
- Enhancement of medical evacuation capability
- Improvement in logistics, supply, repair and spare parts inventory capabilities
- Improved transport and lift capability

Three battalions that incorporate many of these required improvements, in addition to human rights oversight and training, have been trained by US personnel and are operational as of early 2001. The issue of enhancing efficiency through training --- each soldier capable of doing his job better --- will be critical. Effectiveness ---- ensuring that operations by these more efficient troops actually accomplish desired results quickly --- is of paramount importance, since there will be a decline in the number of troops available for garrison duty (as opposed to proactive counter-threat operations) that must protect key economic targets. This is a daunting tautology; the security forces need a smaller and better-trained force of professionals in order to counter the traffickers and insurgents, but they must keep the economy running in order to afford it. However, in order to keep the economy running they must protect economic targets with large numbers of forces that are fixed in place. In addition, as US antiterrorist analysts have found, when the usual targets get too hard because they are well protected, the enemy will always find "softer" targets which in turn require more protection.

One recommendation not found in either the government plan or Ambassador Passage's paper is perhaps implicit in the "professionalization" that both support: increasing the military's pay to make them less vulnerable to corruption and more competitive with legitimate and illegitimate private enterprise for quality recruits. In an economy with 18 per cent urban unemployment --- 30 per cent for males aged 15 to 24 --- there would probably be a large and enthusiastic pool of recruits for a well-remunerated professional force.

In addition, neither plan openly advocates doing away with the rule which states that high school graduate (*bachilleres*) conscripts are exempted from combat units. While this is a significant omission because it does not carry the war to all sectors of society, it is most egregious from a tactical standpoint, in that it deprives the military of a significant highly-

qualified recruit pool for combat and other hazardous duties.²² In fairness, it is hardly surprising that a desire to protect a valuable human resource is present in Colombia, where a substantial proportion of the population is undereducated. While the CIA World Fact Book states that Colombia has a literacy rate of 91 per cent, the United Nations Economic Committee for Latin America and the Caribbean (UN ECLAC) clarifies that statistic by pointing out that 43 per cent of the urban population and 82 per cent of the rural population have at most an elementary education, with 16 per cent of the urban population having less than five years' education. Only 61 per cent of the country's youth completes elementary school. These statistics indicate that only at most 25 per cent of youths 15-24 are in the *bachilleres* category of the conscription-eligible pool, since about 10 percent of the conscription year group is in university and exempt from conscription. *Bachilleres* comprise 12 per cent of the conscripts, meaning they are underrepresented but still not forming a definitive case for calling the practice a form of social discrimination. It could as appropriately be called a strong incentive for youths to complete secondary school, although economic imperatives in a country where 45 per cent of households fell below the poverty line in 1999 (up from 39 per cent in 1980) probably dictate that many children are not unwilling, but rather unable to do so.²³ This issue may become less important as the military reduces its proportion of conscripts from the current 50 per cent down to 25 per cent of the total force.

FACTORS IN THE SOLUTION: REGIONAL ACTORS

A great deal of discussion has centered on the role of Colombia's neighbors and regional organizations in assisting with the implementation of the goals set forth in Plan Colombia. Most US analysts agree that a regional approach is essential, and the current administration's plan for the Andean Initiative show that it also concurs. Nonetheless, many opinion makers and leaders in Colombia's neighbors and other Latin American countries apparently disagree with Plan Colombia. They believe that its implementation will escalate violence in Colombia and adversely affect their nations. If they are to participate in a regional plan, the nature of this involvement has yet to be determined. Regardless of the type or degree of involvement that regional actors may want, most analysts agree that the conflict in Colombia has already spilled across borders and will continue to spread.²⁴ This opinion is not limited solely to Colombia's immediate neighbors; Mexican Foreign Minister Jorge Castañeda made this topic a principal issue of his first meeting with newly confirmed US Secretary of State Colin Powell in January 2001.²⁵

Bolivia and Peru's role as principal suppliers of raw materials has diminished in the past two years as cultivation decreased and eradication or interdiction apparently proved successful. Continued aid to these countries and their own internal efforts will assist in maintaining this downward trend. Of note, neither country allowed eradication using chemical herbicides; both insisted that every plant be cut down manually. In contrast, the bulk of the eradication effort in Colombia has been carried out by aerially-sprayed herbicide. Bolivia's "Dignity Plan" (Plan Dignidad) for drug control continues to focus on eradication in conjunction with crop substitution, followed up with integral development of the social and economic infrastructure of the country's regions. Despite some criticism of the effort's effectiveness, Bolivia will remain part of a regional solution as long as internal political will and US assistance for crop substitution continue. The country has, for the moment, made it easier to cultivate coca elsewhere.

Peru's National Plan for Drug Prevention and Control focuses on interdiction, depriving growers of a market. This strategy attacks the middle (distribution) echelon in the chain rather than the bottom (supplier). While the target population is smaller, it is also less easy to locate. Peruvian security forces were successful against Peruvian traffickers and terrorists. However, they are probably unable to control tactical movement of insurgents or narcotics traffickers around the clock as the Colombia-based groups slip in and out of Peruvian territory for safe passage between points in Colombia. The Peruvian government nevertheless claims it is committed to border patrols. Peru can be considered a willing, if worried, participant in the overall scheme of regional anti-drug efforts and Plan Colombia; however, current political instability in the wake of President Alberto Fujimori's sudden departure, a weak Peruvian economy, a period of reorganization in the armed forces, and what appears to be the return of the dreaded Shining Path may reduce Peru's ability to participate effectively.

Ecuador does not appear unwilling (the government allows the US to employ facilities in Manta for counternarcotics aircraft and training) to assist with regional counterdrug operations, but has expressed some concern over the second-order effects of increased counterdrug and counter-guerrilla activity in Colombia near the Ecuadorian border. Border crossings by guerrillas and traffickers to purchase supplies and entertainment are apparently common. Border dwellers are concerned about an influx of refugees if fighting heats up; facilities have been built to house up to 7500, but by early 2001 only some 1500 had crossed the border. Most of them were transients, using Ecuador for safe passage between two areas within Colombia separated by violence. The Bishop of Lago Agrio, on the border with Colombia, is openly critical of the Colombian initiative, calling it "that damned Plan Colombia." The Ecuadorian left is also vocally opposed, claiming the Plan is a manifestation of Yankee

Imperialism and counternarcotics operations from Ecuadorian territory are a surrender of sovereignty which will drag Ecuador into a Colombian war.²⁶ Some Ecuadorian pleas have sounded more like requests for development assistance for the border region rather than any indication of commitment to a regional plan. Nevertheless, there is a growing realization that a collapse in Colombia would have serious consequences for Ecuador. In January 2001, for the first time, Ecuadorian forces clashed with the FARC and inflicted at least six casualties.

Ecuador has, whether it likes it or not, become a "Confrontation State."

Brazil seems to be the great unknown in the equation. That country's large navigable river network, coupled with a relative inability to control the ground or airspace in the jungle hinterland, would seem to make it the ideal alternative to Colombia for traffickers. Their guerrilla allies may find a transfer to Brazil more difficult due to language and cultural differences that would expose any pretense of a politically-motivated movement as a sham. The Brazilian government's attitude to date has been rather muted, appearing to treat the issue as a purely Colombian problem.

The Brazilian hinterland, from the barren Nordeste to the Guiana Highlands and west to the high jungles of Peru, Bolivia and Colombia, is the country's poorest and least developed region. The government is largely unable to exert its authority either in economic, environmental or Indian affairs; it has been Brazil's "Wild West" since last century. A large portion of the settlers in the West are landless peasants with a tradition of dislike for the state. This is a ripe environment for the traffickers to set up their laboratories and distribution points. Whether they generate a new protection force or co-opt local criminal elements is not the issue. They can fund either alternative, although they will no doubt be cautious about setting up in another country given the treatment they served the Chileans who brought the cocaine industry to Colombia. The issue is what the government can and will do about it.

Until 1998, Brazil had a sizable string of defenses and garrisons in the border region, but the economic recession of the late 1990's resulted in cutbacks. FARC and trafficker activity, arguably as part of a connection with Brazilian drug traffickers in drugs-for-arms exchanges, resulted in 1999 and 2000 in both a Colombian hot-pursuit cross-border operation which the Brazilians tolerated (a demarche was issued well after the fact to allow the Colombians to mop up and withdraw), and a major Brazilian sweep, Operation Cobra.²⁷

It appears that after this show of force, the Brazilians decided to lower their profile in the region. On 20 October 2000, the leading daily Jornal do Brasil reported a secret Air Force document which indicated a broad scope of FARC and trafficker operations in Brazil; the next day, Brazilian Defense Minister Quintao dismissed the report as "pure fantasy." Despite the

Minister's statement, there are strong indications of close links between FARC and the Colombian traffickers with Brazilian criminals. In February of 2001, Colombian Armed Forces Commander General Fernando Tapias announced that a border operation had rounded up a number of Brazilian traffickers in Colombia who were selling weapons to the FARC. There was no Brazilian comment. The Clinton Administration's Assistant Secretary for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement, Rand Beers, claimed that traffickers pay FARC for its protection services in pure cocaine, and FARC leaders Mono Jojoy and others use this as a form of currency to purchase weapons wherever they can, to include Brazil.²⁸

That said, Brazil is only one conduit, with Suriname and Peru also apparently serving this function. In addition, there are no indications at this time of major subversive groups linked directly to FARC operating in northwestern Brazil. By Brazilian reckoning, activity along the border remains a criminal and not a military problem. There is no published comprehensive plan for interdiction or for eradication and control measures in the event cultivation spreads. The UN Economic Council on Latin America and the Caribbean list of regional nations with specific counterdrug plans does not include Brazil as an entry.²⁹

The posture of the Brazilians, as stated at an official brief by the Head of the Brazilian Army War College, General Alvaro Pinheiro, in March 2001 is that the situation in Colombia is a Colombian problem for Colombians to resolve. Brazilian law enforcement has the lead, with military assistance as required, to resolve any ramifications in Brazil. This is a narrow and in my opinion unjustifiably sanguine view. The Brazilian government plans to purchase an aircraft carrier and conventional military forces which will enable it to have the "place in the sun" which its senior military leaders feel a nation of such enormous size deserves. Meanwhile, an unconventional threat that could destabilize the fragile Brazilian economic and sociopolitical structure looms unintended.

Perhaps the Brazilians are quietly holding out for a greater share of the inevitable Washington funds they anticipate will flow into the region, much as the US military did with counternarcotics operations in the late 1980's. This is not as evasive or short-sighted as it may seem; effective patrolling and monitoring of the thousand miles of border will require significant additional expenditure. If the US has an interest in curbing supply which exists chiefly to satisfy US-generated demand, then it is logical to expect that the US will bear a large share of the burden. The danger with this strategy is that Brazil may ignore the threat to itself for too long.

It will be very difficult to get a realistic regional solution to the Colombian problem without forceful and direct Brazilian participation; the other neighbors, including Argentina and perhaps even Venezuela, would follow. The United States has at its disposal a series of informational,

economic, financial, and even military (through engagement) incentives that it should bring to bear in this case to coax Brazil into active involvement. A good start was the inclusion of aid to Brazil and others in the Andean Initiative, but this needs to be reinforced. Brazil's foreign policy emphasis on sovereignty will make cross-border participation problematic but not impossible, as was demonstrated by its peacekeeping role in the Multi-National Observer Mission to Peru and Ecuador (MOMEP).³⁰

A complicator could be Brazil's (and many other nations') great ambivalence toward US intervention in the hemisphere. Brazil probably would want a leadership role, difficult if the US is "the big dog in the fight"; however, other countries as well as Brazil would probably not go forward if the US did not have some kind of leading role. Lastly, the emergence of Brazil as a major, active regional power may be more than its neighbors want at the moment. The Colombia case could be an excellent laboratory for confidence-building in disinterested military, judicial, diplomatic and economic cooperation among democratic South American neighbors. The risks in the experiment could be great, however. The United States would do well to review the possibility of re-establishing regional military frameworks to make regional cooperation feasible and practical.

Venezuela's position on the plan is another conundrum. The conflict in Colombia began spilling into Venezuela long ago, with insurgents using the country as a safe haven and occasionally collecting "taxes" on the Venezuelan side of the 1,300-mile-long border.³¹ In addition, Venezuelan authorities have always complained about Colombian illegal immigration, which has been heightened by increased violence and economic turmoil. There is not yet any evidence of cocaine production on the Venezuelan side of the border.

President Hugo Chávez, arguably the most-democratically elected leader in recent South American history, has broken rules of conventional diplomacy on a number of issues, and his actions toward Colombia are no exception. Chávez's government has placed a high priority on relations with Colombia, but with the flamboyant and mercurial Venezuelan leader that is not always a good thing.³² Chávez's statements that Plan Colombia "threatens to 'Vietnamize' South America," and his open support for the Colombian guerrillas, have at times angered Colombia.³³ Colombia recalled its ambassador to Caracas in November 2000 after Chávez sponsored a FARC member's day-long forum in the Venezuelan National Assembly. In early 2001, Chávez sent his foreign minister to an informational meeting in the *despeje* which had called for ambassadorial representation; while the disproportionately elevated level of representation may have been intended to highlight Venezuela's concern, it was considered an inappropriate and unwelcome overture by the Colombians. This was followed by a scandal

concerning the presence of an airplane hijacker in Venezuela, whom the government had claimed was not in custody even though his arrest after the hijacking was broadcast on television, and then turned out to be Chávez's liaison with a Colombian guerrilla organization.

There are numerous other gaffes, miscues, and incidents related to Chávez, but despite his "demo-dictator" image, in the longer term he has displayed politics which may enable Venezuela to remain a more stable democracy than it might have without his reforms. In addition, in the past several weeks he has played a more conciliatory role toward Colombia, especially as Pastrana becomes more concerned with obtaining tangible results toward peace before his term expires. Personalities may become a decisive issue in the near future if Pastrana is succeeded by a more conservative president with a mandate to take vigorous action against the insurgents. Chávez may actively oppose Colombian military efforts along the border by providing refuge for guerrillas rather than acting as an anvil to a Colombian hammer, and in the worst case could allow insurgents to obtain weapons and training in Venezuela. I believe the answer is to co-opt Chávez, using his monumental ego and drive to make him a significant player in the peace process, allowing him to claim credit if peace is achieved and letting him take the fall if it fails. Venezuela's strategic value to the US as a key oil supplier is matched by Venezuela's interest in regional stability, and Chávez, for all his grandstanding, probably does not want a FARC-dominated or narco-kleptocratic state next door.

US INTERESTS IN THE REGION.

"A billion here, a billion there, and pretty soon you're talking about real money," goes an old saw in Washington.³⁴ While the \$1.3B US portion of the funding for Plan Colombia was approved while the government was predicting major budget surpluses and the economy still appeared robust, this is still a significant amount of money. Even with the soft economy in early 2001, the new administration pledged an additional \$730M for FY2002, although this funding had not been approved by Congress at time of writing. What is US policy regarding the level of our national interest in Colombia, that would justify expenditures of this level at this particular time?

In the distant past of the Reagan Administration, National Security Decision Document 221 recognized that illegal drugs were a national security issue, assigned the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) as the lead agency, and reaffirmed the concept of a drug "war" which has colored every succeeding administration's policy. US military and political involvement in this war on drugs fluctuated, largely as a result of external pressures during the Cold War and Gulf War. The Clinton Administration was the first one able to concentrate on a national security

strategy on drugs after the Cold War. The Office of National Drug Control Policy was established to coordinate interagency operations. After a one-shot regional effort in 1994's operation SUPPORT JUSTICE/STEADY STATE, attention to regional solutions faded. This may have been due to the controversy over the congressionally mandated drug policy certification of several of the governments involved. The second Clinton Administration renewed its interest in a regional and international approach, although its prioritization varied over the years.

The October 1998 National Security Strategy addressed drug trafficking as one of three transnational threats (the other two were terrorism and international crime) in the area of US response to crises.³⁵ The Western Hemisphere section of the document led off by stating, "The principal security concerns in the hemisphere are... drug trafficking, organized crime, money laundering, illegal immigration and terrorism."³⁶ Yes, this sounds like Colombia; however, the entire four-page portion on the hemisphere only addressed Colombia in the context of "efforts to encourage multilateral cooperation... to combat the transnational threats...particularly in Columbia (*sic!!*), where social, political and criminal violence is spilling across borders." It appears one has to probe into more recent material to find justification at the national strategy level.

One year later, the National Security Strategy had taken a completely different tack. The 1999 categories shifted; the new jargon was "drug trafficking and other international crime."³⁷ The chapter on "Advancing US National Interests" dedicated a section to this new category, emphasizing the requirement to stop trafficking "by bolstering the capabilities of source nations to reduce cultivation through eradication and development of alternative crops, and attack production through destruction of laboratories," while tying strategy to cooperative links with foreign governments to "root out corruption, safeguard human rights and respect for the rule of law..."³⁸ The Western Hemisphere section stated that "Colombia is of particular importance" because its problems could transcend its borders and the combination of the drug trade, insurgents and paramilitaries are "testing democracy."³⁹ Plan Colombia was specifically mentioned as "an aggressive three-year Colombian strategy" which the US government will assist and encourage others to assist.

The change in attitude and emphasis was undoubtedly influenced by the election of Andrés Pastrana as President of Colombia in 1998. His predecessor, Enrique Samper, was alleged by the US government to have received campaign financing from narcotraffickers; Samper was even denied a visa to enter the United States. Pastrana's fresh approach to the

struggle against narcotics and insurgency, coupled with his apparently clean record, arguably swayed the Clinton administration's stance.

The George W. Bush (Bush 43) administration's⁴⁰ policy goals on Plan Colombia have not yet been comprehensively stated in an official national security strategy document, although candidate Bush let it be known during his campaign that he is "looking southward" and the Andean Initiative is a concrete commitment.⁴¹ In addition, Bush 43 advisor Robert Zoellick, in a summary of remarks to the Council on Foreign Relations in October 2000, noted: "We cannot continue to make a false distinction between counterinsurgency and counternarcotics efforts." If Colombian leaders have the political will to "take their country back from killers and drug lords... then the U.S. should offer serious, sustained and timely financial, material and intelligence support."⁴² This would be a major departure from previous policy; Colombian Ambassador to the US Luis Moreno actually stated in January 2001 that Colombia would not accept counterinsurgency aid from the US!⁴³ Bush 43 met with President Pastrana in February 2001 to discuss the Plan, and appeared to continue his predecessor's policy. A source that may indicate how White House insiders in the Bush 43 Administration feel about the issue is the Commission on America's National Interests Study; the board members include Bush 43 National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice. The study's summary of national interests lists as "Extremely Important" that "the states of the Western hemisphere (sic) [grow] increasingly democratic, prosperous and stable," and as "Important" that "narcotics trafficking not overturn or come to control the larger countries of the region." The report states that "in South America, the major security concern will continue to be the power of narcotics traffickers, sometimes mixed up in complicated ways with antigovernment guerillas, as is the case in Colombia."⁴⁴

To date, the Administration seems to be more regionally oriented than the Clinton administration, which focused on the Colombian dimension or on individual countries. This may stem from an increased perception that coca growing and cocaine production will simply move elsewhere in the region if Colombia becomes too hot. There are indications that this is what happened in the wake of Bolivia's success in curtailing coca production: coca production in Colombia and Peru went up correspondingly.⁴⁵ The regional approach is a sound one, but risks losing sight of a very significant issue: As the heart and center of the trade, Colombia remains the key to the narcotics traffic industry in South America.

NATURE OF THE PROBLEM: CULTIVATION AND ERADICATION

Drug crop eradication has taken two forms, manual and chemical. Manual eradication has the distinct advantage of being crop-specific, which means that it destroys only the targeted

plants and not other commercially viable crops which a farmer might be growing, and arguably does not have severe environmental effects which could result from use of herbicides. It is also time-consuming and labor-intensive. Placing a large work force on the ground for an extended presence is also risky from a tactical standpoint. Manual eradication would be very difficult in contested areas in Colombia, although FARC leader Manuel Marulanda stated in the "Pact of Los Pozos," which he and Pastrana signed in the *despeje* in February 2001, that his organization would not oppose manual eradication, provided it "proceeded with the common accord of the communities."⁴⁶

Chemical eradication, which currently is based on glyphosate (N-phosphonomethyl-glycine, Monsanto Corporation trade name "Roundup") herbicide, enables rapid destruction of all vegetation in a large area. Monsanto indicates on its product homepage on the web that Roundup is biodegradable and that its low vapor pressure reduces the likelihood of inhalation. In addition, Monsanto claims that the product is only a minor irritant in case of contact with exposed body parts. The label on Roundup concentrate jars sold in as litigious a nation as the US shows few of the federally-mandated dire warnings seen on similar products. As regards ecological effects, the greatest threat to the environment in the region is probably the drug trade, which generates large area clearing for cultivation, and employs toxic chemicals and fuel oil which are disposed of by careless dumping into waterways.⁴⁷

Safety and ecological issues aside, there is no argument that herbicide does not discriminate between desirable and undesirable plants, and this has generated some concern. The principal method of herbicide dissemination has been aerial spraying, which covers large areas in minimum time, with arguably minimal exposure on the ground near the target area. Aerial spraying in Colombia has concentrated on "industrial-sized" plots of 12 hectares or more, rather than on subsistence-sized plots (three hectares or less); however, since many farmers grow legitimate crops alongside coca, there have been claims that chemical eradication results in wholesale destruction of many subsistence farmers' entire livelihood.⁴⁸ The financial incentive of growing coca to supplement meager subsistence income is more than many farmers can pass up. In addition, many families have come to the area in the past two decades precisely because there is a possibility of "breaking even" agriculturally by growing coca and producing coca paste. The Colombian government recognizes this, and since 1986 has declared crops interspersed with coca plants legitimate targets for eradication.⁴⁹ Its method is for the crop substitution agency PLANTE (a branch of the National Alternate Development Plan) to ask farmers to stop growing coca in exchange for economic incentives to grow alternative crops, and to spray only those fields that continue to bear coca. Although this is a long-standing

law, this practice has still resulted in local discontent and claims of ecological and economic disaster.

The genesis of the current campaign of spraying was the phenomenal increase in area under cultivation in Colombia between 1994 and 1998. The transfer of cultivation from Peru and Bolivia led to a decrease in those areas of over 50 per cent (1994: 163,900 hectares; 1998: 89,000 hectares), while cultivation in Colombia went up by over 70 per cent, to 46,000 hectares in Putumayo alone (78,000 hectares nationwide in 1998). The 2001 aerial spraying campaign reportedly destroyed some 29,000 hectares of coca crop. Results of this magnitude indicate that aerial spraying works against "industrial" production. The humane solution to the other part of the problem --- the poverty of the subsistence farmer, which makes coca cultivation so alluring --- is crop substitution.

The Plan Colombia Interagency Action Plan, Phase I, Implementation document focuses on the Putumayo region and states a goal of eliminating 50 per cent of coca cultivation in the state (30 per cent nationwide) by 2003. Accordingly, it establishes a comprehensive agenda for crop substitution and social assistance to the vulnerable population affected by forced eradication and internal displacement.⁵⁰ The plan proposes a synchronized approach that integrates production, marketing and technical assistance and the infrastructure to go with them. In as underdeveloped a place as Putumayo, this is a significant task. Coca is probably the only crop in the region that comes with a ready-made market that includes a transport net and prompt payment. In addition, the Plan notes that integration of the farmers means significant judicial reform because land titles are frequently unavailable or contested in the area (this was a consistent theme in the opening of the US West, and took a century to resolve). The type of crops are also an issue, because subsistence farmers by definition do not grow cash crops and must therefore grow varied food crops in order to ensure adequate nutrition. Of note, emergency assistance is contemplated through contracts with non-governmental and private organizations, rather than by government agencies. This is probably a concession to the realities of the security situation in the area. Efforts will be made to keep the rural population on their farms, although relief centers will be established in Puerto Asís and Mocoa. There are approximately 350,000 inhabitants in Putumayo, distributed into some 70,000 families. Phase I of the Implementation Plan expects to cover 13,000 families by mid-2001, an ambitious goal.

NATURE OF THE PROBLEM: "LA DELINCUENCIA"

INSURGENTS

Plan Colombia's goal is to restore the rule of law by one single, legitimate, representative government. In order for that to happen, the government must reaffirm its sovereignty over national territory and its monopoly on violence, justice, revenue, and administration. President Pastrana sees internal political peace, an elusive goal since the *Violencia* of 1948, as the lynchpin for this return to civil order. At this point, the government has gone to unprecedented lengths in order to secure this peace, to the extent of conceding sovereignty of a 16,200 square-mile swath of territory, called the cleared zone or *despeje*, to one insurgent force and indicating its willingness to do the same for another. The area handed over to the FARC in southern Colombia in 1998 was not under solid government control. As in much of the rest of Colombia, insurgents and other groups operated with relative impunity during some periods when government patrols were not present. The difference is that with the acknowledgement of the *despeje* the government has officially relinquished authority over Colombian territory, a major psychological and legal step.

The stated purpose of the concession is to establish an area where insurgents can discuss peace without threat from government forces; in fact, the FARC admits it has used its area for recruitment, revenue and political consolidation.⁵¹ Peace talks have been desultory and relatively unproductive. It is evident that guerrilla cells nationwide operate without sufficient central authority for the leadership in the *despeje* to guarantee that all its combatants will lay down their arms; US government refusal to meet with insurgent groups is based on a 1998 incident where a major rebel commander, acting independently and against the will of his nominal superiors, ordered the murder of three US Indian activists.⁵² It is also clear that FARC does not limit its major operations to the *despeje*, since its guerrillas carried out a sustained offensive from September 2000 to January 2001 in Putumayo to curtail the initial success in the region of crop substitution strategy by the National Alternative Development Plan's eradication organization, PLANTE.

Politically, FARC's administration of its zone has been much touted by some foreign journalists such as Le Monde's Maurice Lemoine, but it has not inspired much nationwide confidence in the insurgents' political ideas. The government's announcement that it would create a "flexibility zone" ("zona de distensión") for the ELN militia in central Colombia in exchange for a cessation of attacks against petroleum industry targets led to vigorous demonstrations by thousands of residents in the affected areas. This was in spite of the fact

that ELN has operated in that area for 37 years and that it agreed, unlike FARC in the *despeje*, for a permanent independent monitoring group in the area to investigate local complaints.⁵³ The guerrillas' Marxist ideology, even where it blends with Catholic Liberation Theology, has not proven a major attraction for the average Colombian, rich or poor.⁵⁴ FARC remains a power in the nation's remote and underpopulated areas (for all its size, the *despeje* only has a population of 96,000), but has had little success in accessible, populated regions.⁵⁵

The role of FARC and the other guerrilla groups in the illicit narcotics trade began as opposition, but over the years has become clouded until finally the two work hand-in-hand. Regardless of whether it is extorted protection money from farmers or labs, a "business tax" on traffickers for operating in insurgent-claimed territory, or a wholly owned and operated business venture, FARC and the other insurrencies are now part of the greater framework of the narcotics trade. If, as the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and the Colombian police claim, the insurgents are paid their tax/protection fee in drugs, then they are inextricably tied to the commercial aspect, since overseas export and sales are the only way that they could realize any profit from this type of collected revenue.⁵⁶

Militarily, the guerrilla triumphs of 1996-1998 demonstrated a significant increase in guerrilla capability, and demonstrated a new low in government incompetence. It appeared the guerrillas could defeat large formation in the field, and hold territory. This was no doubt a factor in Pastrana's decision to allow the *despeje*. Since that time, however, the army has improved its training and equipment significantly. With no real reduction in FARC operations, there has been a significant reduction in army casualties. In recognition of this new capability, FARC tactics in recent engagements have eschewed large-formation pitched battles.

In summary, if there is a mutual-survival link between the insurgents and the narcotraffickers, then political and economic solutions must be found to separate the insurgents from the traffickers, and then establish a lasting internal political peace, before any real work can begin on combating drugs. If these approaches fail, then the government must be prepared to use military means. The political support to finance this approach can only come from the United States and regional nations, since Europe rejects any military solution. The question is whether time will be on the side of the guerrillas or the government. Professionalization of the armed forces works against the guerrillas, and puts time on the side of the government. On the other hand, the progressive deterioration of the economy hinders the government's ability to carry out enhancement of military capabilities and therefore puts time on the side of the guerrilla. The United States can break this cycle by funding training and equipment improvements beyond Colombia's ability to pay for them, regardless of whether the

improvements contribute exclusively to counterdrug operations or have dual-use application in counterinsurgency and counterdrug operations. That will take a major policy change in Washington, requiring the US military and political leadership to finally shrug off the "Vietnam syndrome" it has carried for a quarter century.

NARCOTRAFFICKERS

There is an apocryphal story about the US outlaw Willie Sutton, famous for sensational holdups in the 1920's. A reporter asked him, "Willie, why do you rob banks?" Sutton answered, "Because that's where the money is!" The moral of this anecdote is that a criminal is not necessarily committing crimes because of some deep-seated social problem or an inability to enter the legitimate employment market; he does it for the money. One has but to look at lawyer and money-launderer Harvey Weinig, subject of a last-minute pardon by President Clinton in 2001, to see that even the very wealthy and fortunate will participate in crime if there is enough profit or power involved.⁵⁷ Individuals will continue to engage in narcotics trafficking as long as there is demand for their product. The only question in this regard is how to diminish their influence, wealth, and freedom of movement in Colombia and elsewhere.

Plan Colombia is designed specifically to target traffickers' "centers of gravity," listed as personnel, production centers, distribution systems (air, ground, riverine and sea), and money laundering.⁵⁸ This last point is one where US participation will be vital, since the bulk of profits for traffickers are in US currency transactions from the largest drug market. Elimination of the end result of traffickers' efforts is the true center of gravity of the narcotics trade --- because, as Willie Sutton said, that's where the money is, and money and the power it enables are the key motive for the trade. US commitment to vigorous prosecution of money laundering received a great deal of negative press following Weinig's pardon, and has not recovered. The perception is that the US is willing to wage the fight against Colombians in the US and in Colombia, but is not willing to deal as harshly with moneyed interests in the US who are the key to drug traffickers' financial power. In the flap about the Clinton pardons, an excellent opportunity to set the record straight by highlighting US achievements and efforts was lost.

The Implementation Plan addresses purchase of information systems and training within the Prosecutor General's Office to detect and prevent asset and money laundering nationwide. Annex E, Appendix 6 discusses an ambitiously long list of reforms, action groups, and forces that will be established by 2003, but the only designation of funds is for approximately \$1.6M for cellular and radio monitoring equipment, x-ray machines and laptops for Customs agencies.

The presumption is that refocusing the mission and reorganizing the institution will enable success.

SELF-DEFENSE FORCES

The United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia or *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC) are generally referred to as paramilitaries. They began as a logical consequence or effect of the insurgency and lawlessness, but have now become part of the problem. One difficulty with the AUC is that, if they did not exist, someone would soon invent them.

In 1985, as it realized that it could not guarantee the safety of citizens in many areas, the Colombian government authorized and encouraged the formation of local self-defense units, or *autodefensas*; in effect these were a home guard. The government provided some obsolescent weapons and little training. While many of these groups were helpful in resisting local guerilla activity and provided a legitimate defense function that allowed a partial return to normalcy and security in rural life, some individuals used their authority and ordnance to dispose of what they perceived to be as guerrilla sympathizers, or in some cases simply persons whom they saw as a threat for personal or financial reasons. In many of these cases, it appears that military personnel linked to the groups in an official capacity knew of and perhaps even abetted the extralegal actions by the individuals.

The government rescinded its authorization by 1988, but the die had been cast. Many of the *autodefensas* continued to operate without government approval, and in many cases increased their now patently illegal activities. Many of the assassinations of reintegrated guerrillas of the *Unión Patriótica* and M-19 were undoubtedly carried out by members of death squads who got their start in the *autodefensas*. Carlos Castaño, charismatic leader of a local group, formed a loosely-knit national confederation, now known collectively as the AUC, in the mid-1990's.

Castaño admits that his organization's groups "tax" coca growers rather than oppose them, allegedly because coca cultivation is the only source of revenue in many subsistence-farming areas, but claims over 80 per cent of his revenues come from ranchers and farmers who pay for protection "voluntarily."⁵⁹ There are definite ties between retired and former military members and the AUC, with some 35 former officers and 1000 former enlisted men swelling its ranks. This could be an outgrowth of US-backed campaigns to expel military members with a poor human rights record; these men would naturally gravitate toward the AUC. As a result, the AUC counts on a more professional cadre than the guerrillas. The organization now numbers some 8,000, up from an estimated 850 in 1992; in contrast, ELN has shrunk from 6,000 fighters

in 1999 to about 3,500 in 2001. There are no reports of the AUC employing children in its front lines, as the guerrillas do because of their difficulty in attracting volunteers. Despite, or perhaps because of, its popularity and composition, the AUC is blamed for the majority of politically-related murders in Colombia. Various sources estimate it was responsible for up to 75 per cent of these killings over the past three years, and the government claims in 1999 AUC liquidated 932 persons out of some 2,200 murdered countrywide for political reasons; Castaño admits to a number of these.⁶⁰

The international media that glorify or excuse guerrilla violence portray these so-called "paramilitaries" as existing to perpetrate human rights violations on behalf of and in collusion with right-wing elements and the military, rather than as an outgrowth of conflict and carrying out a defense function at least as legitimate as the insurgents' allegedly justicialist actions. In this respect, however, it cannot be argued that the groups also contribute to lawlessness by arrogating the state's sole authority to carry out acts of violence. The combination of bad press, genuinely extralegal status, and documented abuses, have prevented the same level of political recognition being accorded to the AUC by the Colombian government and foreign organizations and states that is given to the long-standing Marxist insurgent groups. In fact, the US and Colombian governments characterize the AUC as the principal threat to stability in Colombia.⁶¹

If the AUC is, as it purports to be, a genuine self-defense grouping, it should dissolve of its own accord in locations where peace with the guerrillas is achieved. That said, the likelihood of either peace or AUC self-dissolution occurring without significant government military pressure is remote. AUC needs to be treated in the same way as other guerrillas, to include non-recognition by the US, and status as a criminal organization.

CONCLUSION

Pastrana cannot run again for president, and it appears that the front runner, Álvaro Uribe, tends toward a tougher approach to the insurgents. A dramatic shift in internal politics could result in much of Plan Colombia's funding and effort being derailed or shifted toward a different strategy. US funding is finite and likely to decrease in the near years. If the Plan is to be retained internally and supported externally, visible success must be accomplished soon. The biggest challenge in implementing the Plan as it currently exists is the requirement for some degree of internal peace and prosperity to exist in order to allow it to work. Does this mean that the Plan is a bad plan, hopelessly optimistic, and will only result in a great amount of money poured down a figurative drain? The answer is that, while Plan Colombia probably promises too much given Colombia's limited resources and continual unrest, any action which offers even a

modest improvement will be salutary because it will give something more to build on for the future. Plan Colombia is not hopeless, it represents the only real strategy proposed to date. It needs to be made to work.

What is required to make the Plan work? First and foremost, political will to stay the course and not discount Colombia's prospects out of hand – not just on the part of the Colombia, but on the part of the US and also of regional partners. Second, funding to support and perhaps elicit the will of the Colombians and their neighbors. Third, US and Colombian official acceptance of the blindingly obvious fact that traffickers and insurgents are linked and that either that link or both organizations must be broken. The greatest obstacle so far to the second element, a regional solution, is that Pastrana has not actively solicited and proposed anything beyond diplomatic observer participation on the part of his neighbors; Plan Colombia remains a Colombian plan, addressing only Colombia's needs, with a parallel and not wholly integrated US regional plan alongside. It should be noted that the third element, counterinsurgency, has been left out of Plan Colombia altogether.

Plan Colombia contains enough flexibility to allow the ongoing peace process to play itself out and either succeed or see the incorporation of a counterinsurgency annex. What is needed next is an inclusive regional strategy linked to the Colombian strategy. While we might do this out of some high-minded sense of moral consideration for our hemispheric partners, I prefer to think that we would base it on an objective determination of our national interests which clearly dictates that we assist Colombia and the region to regain and maintain stability.

Word Count = 11,353

ENDNOTES

¹ John T. Fisher, "Colombia: Civil-Military Relations in the Midst of War." Joint Forces Quarterly, Summer 2000; p. 53.

² US Department of State Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – 2000." DOS, Washington, D.C. 2000

³ William L. LeoGrande and Kenneth E. Sharpe, "Two wars or one? Drugs, guerrillas and Colombia's new Violencia." World Policy Journal, Vol. 17, No.3, Fall 2000, p.1

⁴ US Dept of State, op. cit.

⁵ Office of the Presidency of the Republic of Colombia: Plan for Peace, Prosperity, and the Strengthening of the State. Online at www.embacol.org.au/English/Plan%20Colombia; January, 2001

⁶ Kevin Clarke, "Just say no to this drug war." US Catholic, January 2001. Clarke is characteristic of the genre, mixing some well-intentioned opinion with some out-of-context facts and some just plain wrong information. He intelligently argues that a comprehensive plan needs to include neighboring countries to keep the problem from simply being transferred elsewhere, and that a major demand reduction effort is needed in the US; however, after stating that a successful plan needs to train the Colombian military and police, he then claims that the Plan is a US device to funnel large quantities of funds to the Colombian military and that this is a wrong policy, which is both contradictory and factually incorrect. See also the redoubtable Ralph Peters, LTC(R), USA, who in an editorial on page B1 of the Sunday, March 5, 2000 Washington Post entitled "The US Is Setting A Trap for Itself in Colombia" decries US aid as "a blank check" which will probably result in nothing more than creating increased dependency for dollars on the part of a corrupt and unrepresentative Colombian regime. Peters goes so far as to state that the best outcome might be an apocalyptic collapse of the government, generating a crisis of such proportions that the US and other countries will finally be forced to intervene with the necessary vigor --- which is to my mind the equivalent of "setting fire to the village in order to save it."

⁷ Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, US Dept of State. "Fact Sheet: United States Support for Colombia" DoS, Washington , D.C.: 28 March 2000. Obtained online at www.state.gov.

⁸ James Wilson, "US senators tour Colombia," FT.com (Financial Times). February 19, 2001. The FT report states that "most of the funds were earmarked for military hardware and training to help wipe out drug crops in Colombia."

⁹ Sergio Gómez Maser, "Más presupuesto para la lucha contra las drogas." El Tiempo, March 15, 2001.

¹⁰ "Represado el comercio exterior en Buenaventura." El Tiempo, March 15, 2001.

¹¹ Plan Colombia Plan for Peace section refers to the current economic situation in the country as the worst crisis in 70 years (page 2).

¹² "European Parliament resolution on Plan Colombia and support for the peace process in Colombia, February 1, 2001." EU Document B5-0087/2001. See also "European Parliament resolution on Plan Colombia and support for the peace process in Colombia, February 1, 2001." See also "Millones para Plan Colombia", Financial Times, 7 July 2000. The article gives a European and worldwide spin to the commitment for aid, and notes that President Pastrana's plan "obtained the anticipated aid;" in fact, much of the funding was from US and UN/IMF sources rather than from Europe.

¹³ Pastrana was forced to return early from his trip following a recrudescence of FARC violence and the consequent sharpened national debate on whether to terminate or prorogue the FARC enclave, whose approval was up for renewal. BBC World Service report, "Pastrana retorna antes de lo previsto," January 23, 2001.

¹⁴ Allain Abelard, "Europeans refuse to support the peace plan in Colombia." Le Monde, 26 July 2000.

¹⁵ European Union press release 038/01, Brussels, 12 March 2001

¹⁶ Plan Colombia Approach to the Colombian Economy, p. 3.

¹⁷ Plan Colombia Preface, p. 2. This language implies that the military and law enforcement entities will keep the peace, not make it.

¹⁸ Presidency of the Republic of Colombia, Plan Colombia, Interagency Action Plan. Undated, estimated publication date mid-2000. The only references I found to FARC, EPL or ELN were in the acronyms list. Annex F, Appendix 3, page 2 contains a reference to the link between narcotics and armed groups. Other paragraphs refer to the "protection elements" of narcotics facilities, which makes the definition of "armed groups" ambiguous as far as insurgent groups are concerned.

¹⁹ David Passage, "The United States and Colombia: Untying the Gordian Knot." Paper prepared for the US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute. Carlisle, PA: March 2000, p. 13

²⁰ Reuters, "Colombia Fires 135 Police Officers". February 28, 2001

²¹ Passage, "The United States and Colombia," pp. 13-16. The Plan's Counter-Drug Strategy includes measures similar to those recommended by Amb. Passage.

²² The army only included 8,000 *bachilleres* out of a total of 106,00 troops in 2000, but this statistic is deceptive. There are only 48,000 conscripts in any given year, so the proportion of *bachiller* conscripts is actually quite high given the proportion of *bachilleres* in the overall population. It may be worth pointing out that a parallel exemption occurs in Israel, where Orthodox religious are exempt from service, although they are some of the most strident advocates of policies that lead to violence; few academics seem to find this objectionable. The United States provided deferment from the draft for college students, which frequently resulted in a total exemption (as it did for Messrs. Clinton and Gingrich).

²³ Centro Económico para América Latina y el Caribe (UN CEPAL/ECLAC), Panorama Social de América Latina 2000. Pages 82 and 184-187 (Statistical Annex). This is a treasure trove of comparative social statistics.

²⁴ "Containing Colombia's Troubles," New York Times editorial. January 15, 2001, p. 14. The editorial clearly advocates a regional approach. A subsequent editorial (January 28, 2001) strongly urged prioritizing a social and economic, as opposed to military, approach to a solution, and cautioned against employment of US troops.

²⁵ Jane Perlez, "Mexico Warns of Colombian Drug War Spillover." New York Times, Jan 31, 2001.

²⁶ Martin Kaste, "Colombia's Conflict Widens", in National Public Radio's Morning Edition of December 4, 2000. See also Anthony Faiola, "US Base in Ecuador Stirs Debate," Washington Post, January 25, 2001, page 1. A FARC spokesman called the US base in Manta "a declaration of war on the FARC."

²⁷ "Brazil begins security operation along border with Colombia." CNN, September 27, 2000.

²⁸ Bill Rodgers, "FARC operating in Brazil," Voice of America broadcasts 20 and 21 October 2000.

²⁹ ECLAC Panorama Social, p.213. Sixteen nations are listed.

³⁰ Arguably, participation in MOMEPE was in conjunction with Brazil's role as guarantor of the Peace Protocol of the Rio Treaty, a relic of Brazil's historic past and Getulio Vargas' strategic vision of Brazil as a major hemispheric player. Participation in the case of Colombia would be based on events in a single country, not between two recognized sovereign nations. Perhaps the "moral imperative" arguments used in Kosovo can be brought to bear. As for Brazil's focus on conventional forces, the US experience in the wake of the Cold War demonstrates that it is hard to "transform" armies and navies, or even for national leadership to recognize a shift in political-strategic requirements.

³¹ María Cristancho, "La Guerra se pasa a las fronteras 'calientes'." El Tiempo, March 4, 2001. For example, the bodies of three US activists murdered by the FARC in 1998 were found in Venezuela.

³² David Wernick, "Venezuela's President is playing with fire." Salon.com, 17 August 2000. Wernick quotes Peter Hakim, president of the Inter-American dialogue, as saying Chávez "craves the limelight."

³³ Jeremy McDermott and Ben Fenton, "Bush rejects role in Colombia." Daily Telegraph, February 28, 2001.

³⁴ Everett Dirksen (attributed), quoted in Bartlett's Familiar Quotations. Little, Brown & Co.: New York, 1992, p. 694.

³⁵ Clinton, William J., A National Security Strategy for a New Century. The White House, Washington, D.C.: October 1998, p.18. Curiously, the document separates international crime and drug trafficking, with the “international crime” category more closely linked to arms trading and computer theft.

³⁶ Ibid. p.48

³⁷ William J. Clinton, A National Security Strategy for a New Century. The White House, Washington, D.C.: December 1999, p.2.

³⁸ Ibid. p.15

³⁹ Ibid., p.40 “Colombia” is correctly spelled in the 1999 version.

⁴⁰ Hereinafter referred to as Bush 43 to differentiate it from that of the 41st President, George H.W. Bush, known as “Bush 41”. This device is used in the White House by the Bush 43 administration, in part because there are so many “retreads” from Bush 41’s term serving Bush 43.

⁴¹ Andrés Oppenheimer, “Growing Hispanic Power Will Influence Foreign Policy”. The Miami Herald, 8 March 2001.

⁴² Karen deYoung, “Colombia Plan Faces Crunch Time.” Washington Post, December 22, 2000, p.34.

⁴³ Marcela Sánchez, “No Counterinsurgency Aid for Colombia.” Washington Post, January 31, 2001. Moreno’s comment was probably an effort to prevent a major debate on “Vietnam-style quagmires” from erupting at a sensitive political moment, the beginning of an administration in the US. By letting Zoellick off the hook, he compensated to some extent for the poor public relations job the US and Colombian governments did in regards to the initial introduction of Plan Colombia.

⁴⁴ The Commission on America’s National Interests, America’s National Interests. Cambridge, MA: 2000, p.35.

⁴⁵ Kevin G. Hall, “Bolivia Winning the War Against Coca Production.” Miami Herald, February 27, 2001. Bolivia eliminated 94,000 acres of coca plants, all by manual (non-chemical) means. Peru employed interdiction of traffickers rather than crop destruction. Cultivation may be on the increase in Peru once again to compensate for the decline in Bolivia.

⁴⁶ “Pacto de Los Pozos,” El Tiempo, February 9, 2001. See also Dick Reavis, Guerrilla Leader Is Figure of Rumor, Revolution.” San Antonio Express-News, January 16, 2001. “Marulanda” is actually a nom de guerre for Pedro Antonio Marín, approximately 72 years old. The original Manuel Marulanda was a Communist guerrilla who operated earlier in the twentieth century.

⁴⁷ Dick J. Reavis, “Prosperity on the Farm.” San Antonio Express-News, January 14, 2001. Among the chemicals required are ammonia, sulfuric acid, and potassium permanganate.

Production of a kilo of coca paste or base requires at least 25 gallons of diesel or gasoline. In addition, the sensitive coca plants must be treated extensively with fertilizer and pesticides.

⁴⁸ Allison Major, "Coca Eradication: The Case for Action." Washingtonpost.com Live interview, January 12, 2001. Major is a senior policy analyst at the Office of National Drug Control Policy.

⁴⁹ George Gedda, US Defends Herbicide to Colombia. Associated Press, March 13, 2001.

⁵⁰ Implementation Plan, pp. D-1 and G-5-2.

⁵¹ Maurice Lemoine, "Why Colombia's guerrillas haven't made peace." Le Monde, May 2000. Lemoine fancies himself a latter-day Regis Debray.

⁵² "US declines Colombian request to meet with guerrillas." Agence France Press, February 27, 2001.

⁵³ "Reglamento para la zona de encuentro," government document published in El Tiempo, 26 January 2001. The designations of the zone have changed from "stretch zone" to "meeting zone." Unlike the FARC zone, the government was to retain legal jurisdiction over the ELN zone. The principal terms were on military issues.

⁵⁴ Dick Reavis, "FARC Guerrillas Are Rebels Without A Clear Cause." San Antonio Express News, January 16, 2001. Reavis quotes respected Colombian columnist Manuel Gómez Buendía's opinion that the FARC "lacks a political program, a social base, and a national presence," and that it is a "lapsed communist organization with only regional appeal."

⁵⁵ Juan Forero, "Colombia, in Risky Move, Plans to Cede Zone to Second Rebel Group." New York Times, January 27, 2001.

⁵⁶ "Colombian general claims proof of rebel trafficking." Agence France Press, February 20, 2001.

⁵⁷ Andrew Selsky, "Clinton Pardon Outrages Colombians." Associated Press, February 27, 2001. Weinig's sentence was commuted after serving six of eleven years. He was a major money-laundering figure for the Cali cartel, and was also sentenced for failing to report a kidnapping.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. F-3

⁵⁹ Héctor Colledo, "Entrevista a Carlos Castaño, líder de las A.U.C." Urgente Digital, March 30, 2001.

⁶⁰ Scott Wilson, "Colombia's Other Army." Washington Post, March 12, 2001.

⁶¹ Margarita Martinez, "Colombian Army Claims Progress Against Killings. Philadelphia Inquirer, December 12, 2000.

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